

Employment

Employment during the adolescent years may have beneficial or negative effects on the health and well-being of youth. Early work experience among adolescents may aid in the development of personal responsibility, smooth the transition from youth to adulthood, and improve occupational attainment and income (1). In some instances, adolescent employment may contribute to the basic economic resources of the adolescent's family. However, there are health and safety concerns for working adolescents. Working teens are more likely to have problems in school and are less able to participate in after school activities than their peers. They also are at risk of occupational injury and of illness due to toxic exposure (2-4).

■ In the United States, adolescents are often employed in jobs after school, on weekends, and during vacations. Employment refers to jobs in which the adolescent has an ongoing relationship with a particular employer. Freelance jobs such as babysitting or lawn mowing are not included in the adolescent employment statistics.

■ The most common jobs for adolescents are in fast-food and service industries, restaurants, retail and grocery stores, farms, nursing homes, and factories. Low-income teens are more likely than their higher income peers to be employed in high-risk jobs such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction (2).

■ In 1999 approximately two-fifths of all adolescents 16–19 years of age worked during the school year (April). During the summer months (July) when most adolescents are not in school, employment and hours worked increase substantially. In 1999 over one-half of all adolescents 16–19 were employed during the summer months.

■ The proportion of teens who worked increased with age. For example, in 1999 the proportion of teens working during the school year increased from 26 percent of 16-year olds to 56 percent of 19-year olds. Overall, adolescent males and females were equally likely to be employed.

■ Hazardous work environments put adolescents at risk of serious injury or death. During the period

1992–97 there were over 400 fatalities in the work place to adolescents 17 years of age or younger (5). Causes of death included highway and nonhighway vehicle-related incidents, homicides, falls, electrocutions, and fires.

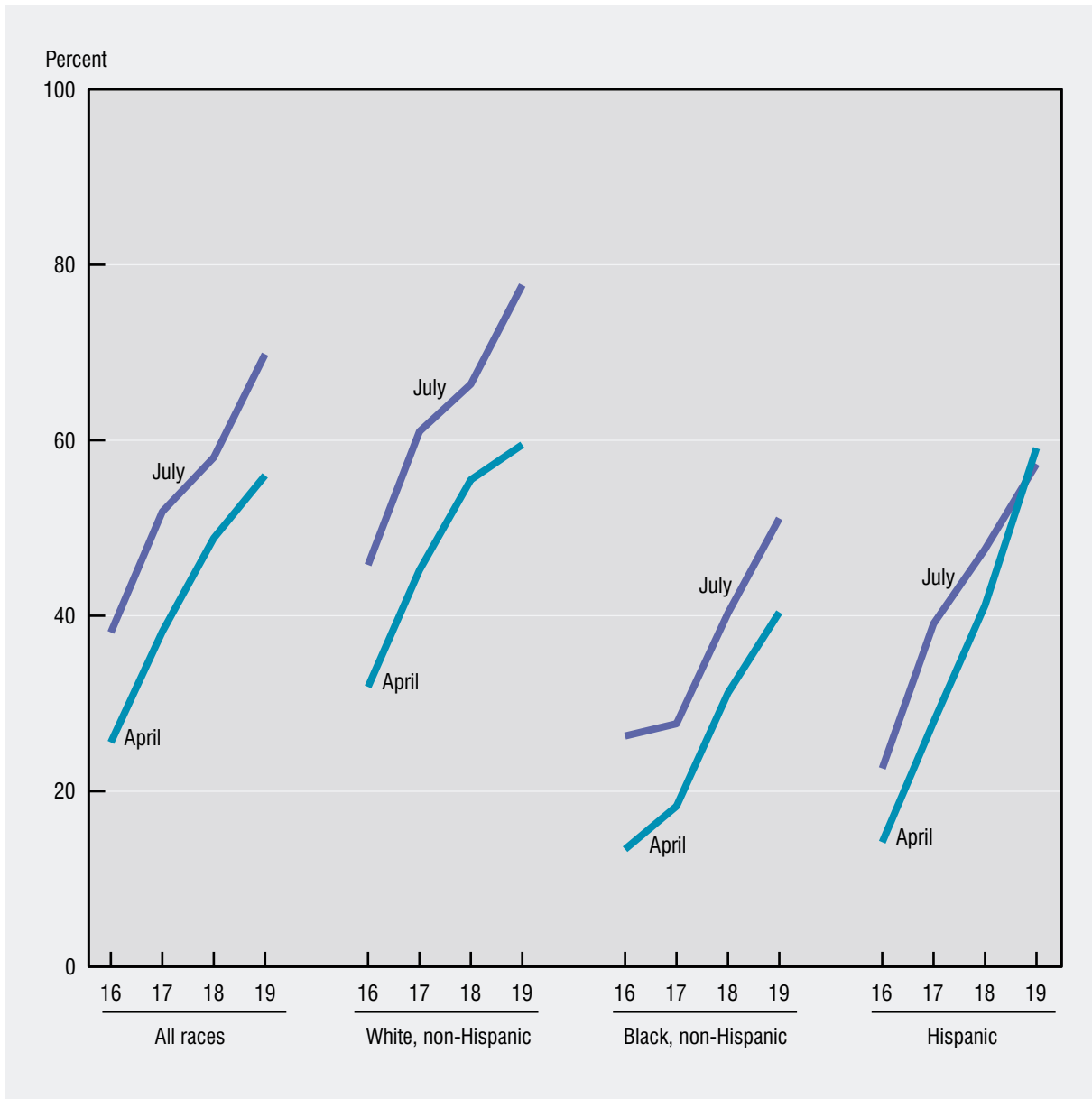
■ In 1998 almost 260,000 adolescents 15–19 years of age were treated in emergency departments for occupational injuries (6). Common nonfatal injuries include sprains and strains, burns, cuts, and bruises. Most persons less than 18 years of age enter the workplace with minimal prior experience for a job (3). More than one-half of adolescents 14–16 years of age treated in emergency departments for work injuries reported that they had received no training in the prevention of the injury they sustained. Healthy People 2010 objectives call for a reduction in the incidence of adolescent work injuries (7).

■ Teens who work more than 20 hours a week are considered to be at a higher risk of negative health outcomes (3). In 1999, 43 percent of employed adolescents worked for more than 20 hours per week during the school year. That number increased to 68 percent during the summer.

References

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Figure 3. Employment during April and July among adolescents 16–19 years of age, by age, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, 1999



NOTES: Employment is defined as a job in which the adolescent has an ongoing relationship with a particular employer for any number of hours per week. The Bureau of Labor Statistics uses April as representative of school year employment and July as representative of summer employment. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Survey, April and July 1999.